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John Bolin

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Beckett's *Murphy*, Gide's *Les Caves du Vatican*, and the "Modern" Novel

John Bolin

Beckett's second novel, *Murphy* (completed 1936; published 1938) has long been dividing its readers. Some of Beckett's commentators, for instance Hugh Kenner and Andrew Gibson, have read the novel as an example of "Beckett's early realism"—a retreat from the self-reflexivity and narrative experiments of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (completed 1932).¹ Others have suggested precisely the opposite. John Fletcher has argued that *Murphy* is an ironic metafiction presenting "a parody of the traditional novel," while J. M. Coetzee suggests that it plays a complex game with narrative authority which targets the very "rules" and "codes" of the novel.² More is at stake here than our appreciation of one of Beckett's early fictions; such accounts play an important part in how the story of Beckett's artistic development is told. In the first reading, *Murphy* is a "sole exercise, and an anomalous one" which Beckett had to abandon for a "turn away from realism after *Murphy*" towards the complexity of his postwar fictions.³ In the second, *Murphy*'s unsettling narrative technique anticipates the inner workings of Beckett's masterpieces of the 1940s and 1950s; its "attitude of reserve toward the novel" "grows, and by the time of *The Unnamable* (1953) has become . . . the subject of Beckett's work" (*DP*, 37).

In the following I suggest that Beckett's readers remain divided over this issue because, despite considerable efforts to recover his early sources, the fictional theory behind *Murphy*'s "realism" and its specific type of irony has remained obscure. Once this context is supplied, *Murphy* reveals itself as a text which playfully re-engages the fundamental dilemma Beckett outlined in his 1930 lectures on the "modern" novel and which

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John Bolin is Lecturer in English at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales. From 2009–11 he was Co-chair of the Samuel Beckett: Debts and Legacies Seminar at the University of Oxford. He has published on Beckett in *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui* and *The Review of English Studies*. His book, *Beckett and the Modern Novel* is forthcoming.



- 772 he first approached in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*: the impossibility of representing an irreducibly complex reality through language. In this way, Beckett's second novel discloses an ongoing dialogue with his greatest master in the theory of the novel, André Gide, and, through hitherto concealed allusions, reveals significant debts to his *Les Caves du Vatican* (translated into English as *Lafcadio's Adventures*).

In a recent article I suggested Gide's importance to the Beckett of *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, yet this influence might seem to have faded quickly.⁴ Gide does not appear in C.J. Ackerley's recent and exhaustively annotated companion to *Murphy*, and to the best of my knowledge, no allusions to Gide have yet been identified in the novel. But Beckett had not left his early master behind; in the months before he started *Murphy*, he made the last of at least three frustrated attempts to compose a monograph on Gide.⁵ The book never materialized, but Gide's influence did make its way into Beckett's next novel, most clearly in his handling of character. Murphy's divided mind has long fascinated commentators, yet the character's oddities play an important part in the modern attempt to resist novelistic naturalism—undifferentiated from realism—and its ally, coherence. To get a sense of what these terms meant to Beckett we must return to his theory of the modern novel as delivered in his 1930 lectures at Trinity College, Dublin.

In his lectures, Beckett rehearses the critique of the nineteenth century French novel set out by Gide in his *Dostoïevsky* (1923). This book takes Balzac as its chief example of an artist who relies on rational causality and comprehensible motive in the construction of his characters.⁶ But Gide's larger target is the Western-European logic which undergirds this type of form, a logic which strives for a unification of the self by skirting the irrational or unknowable aspects of experience and the psyche. Against this tradition, he valorizes the modern paradigm best represented by Dostoevsky. Following Gide, Beckett suggests in his lectures that in Dostoevsky the subject is not only inherently multiple (as in Proust, another modern author) but in *conflict with itself* (MIC60, 29).⁷ Beckett bases this argument on Gide's notion of "antagonisms" between the three essential divisions he found within the personalities of Dostoevsky's heroes: "first, the province of intellectual speculation, then the domain of the passions, midway between the former and the third region, a vast realm remote from the play of passion" (*D*, 126). Beckett identifies the third region as the crucial element that violates the "artificial unification of character" in the European tradition (MIC60, 29). He also follows Gide in indicating the importance of areas of "shadow" in the depiction of character, regions which remain unexplained or incomprehensible, even to the characters themselves. Unlike the well-lit panoramas of the naturalist novel, Gide's Dostoevsky practices an art in which "shadow" is essential (MIC60, 27).

Beckett appropriates Gide's tripartite scheme for the irrational and conflicted modern character for the first time in *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* but he also returns to it in his second novel.⁸ And although Murphy's much-discussed mind—composed of "the three zones, light, half light, dark, each with its speciality"—does not feature Dostoevsky's content for the first two "zones," Beckett did cull the most important, the

third division, directly from Gide's schema.⁹ This is a "dark" area, remote from passion and reason, a "wider region . . . where the limits of existence fade away, where the notion of the individual and of time is lost, the place wherein Dostoevsky sought . . . the secret of happiness" (*D*, 144, 125–6). Murphy's chair is of course the vehicle by which he "abnegates" willing and thereby enters a Dostoevskian "dark": a "solidarity that knows no distinctions (*D*, 127)." Note how, as in Gide's text, time and individual consciousness fade as Murphy enters the third zone:

The dark [was] nothing but forms becoming and crumbling into the fragments of a new becoming, without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the purest forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. (*M*, 72)

Murphy's tripartite *mind*, however, is not as important as his divided *self*, which is dual. In fact, sidetracked by analyses of Murphy's mind as "it felt and pictured itself to be" (*M*, 69), Beckett's commentators have neglected the crucial schism in this hero that is intended to playfully subvert the realist novel at the level of character. Murphy is less a Spinozan, Schopenhauerian, or a Cartesian creature than a parodic type of the "dual personality" Gide valorized in *The Possessed*, which Beckett read at Trinity, in French, after studying Gide's theory (see *D*, 103). Beckett drew up the first half of this "unredeemed split self" (*M*, 117) by grouping Gide's first two strata of the subject (the intellect and the passions), the very components which he had *not* used in the account of Murphy's mind in section six. Thus the *first* Murphy is given to the "steady activity of the mind" and is prey to his bodily urges—"his deplorable susceptibility to Celia, ginger, and so on" (*M*, 112)—while the *second* Murphy longs for the third zone's realm of "abnegation" (*MIC*60, 23). This duality will not be collapsed; as Gide pointed out of Dostoevsky's characters, Murphy never "relinquishes consciousness of his dual personality with its inconsistencies" (*D*, 103). In fact, the drama of the novel largely consists of the intensifying struggle between "the self whom [Murphy] loved" and "the self whom he hated" (*M*, 121). This agon continues right up to Murphy's final attempt to return to Celia after his encounter with Endon, and culminates in his literal explosion.

Beckett's comic re-deployment of *Dostoevsky's* discussion of character may be the most obvious way that *Murphy* playfully subverts the European tradition of novelistic realism, but it is not the most important one. Like *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*, *Murphy* reveals a Beckett who is not only concerned with disturbing the coherent realist subject, but intent on complicating narrative linearity and authority in the novel. Yet Beckett's metafictional technique in *Murphy* is more subtle than in his first attempt, to the extent that readers as perceptive as Kenner have missed it entirely. This is largely because almost without exception Beckett's commentators have neglected the role of the key figure in that technique: *Murphy's* narrator.

Because he remains nameless and his gaze roams over his world from on high, there is perhaps a temptation to pass over Beckett's speaker as a conventional convenience,

- 774 a version of the realist omniscient narrator transported from the work of the “divine Jane” Austen or Balzac (*DFM*, 119). But unlike Austen’s or Balzac’s narrators, Beckett’s speaker frequently interferes with the diegesis, using a mixture of deliberate clichés, ironic reflections on literary texts and devices, and references to censors, the reader, or other novels to emphasize *Murphy*’s status as textual construct:

The ceiling was lost in the shadows, yes, really lost in the shadows (*M*, 42).

It was an aposiopesis of the purest kind (*M*, 103).

He tried with the men, women, children and animals that belong to even worse stories than this (*M*, 157).

The above passage is carefully calculated to deprave the cultivated reader (*M*, 75).

The cackle of a nightingale would have been most welcome, to explode his spirit towards its nightingaleless night. But the season seemed over (*M*, 149).

His body being too active with its fatigue to permit of this, he submitted to sleep, Sleep son of Erebus and Night, Sleep half-brother to the Furies (*M*, 111).

Aspects of this ironic technique—especially the use of allusion in the last two quotations—might initially suggest a debt to Joyce, and one can usefully compare the irony in *Murphy* to that of *Ulysses*, especially from “Wandering Rocks” onward. As David Hayman and Hugh Kenner have pointed out, in this episode a narrating consciousness seems to emerge behind Joyce’s novel “like a giant . . . slowly coming awake.” This consciousness at times stresses “the artifice of [the novel’s] surfaces” and exposes style as a “game [he] is playing.”¹⁰ An important result of the interference of the “Arranger” is that it alters the nature of the irony in the text. Irony in *Ulysses* is not “objective” as Kenner argues it is in *Dubliners* or *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but is generated by our sense of the giant’s knowing gaze as he manipulates the novel’s carefully wrought style and order.¹¹ Similarly, *Murphy*’s allusions serve to reveal an individual who hovers over the novel and reflects on it. And, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Joyce’s giant, this figure’s arch gaze is not only directed at the story’s textuality.

It is hard to say where the fault lies in the case of Ticklepenny . . . but certainly the quality of his speech is most wretched. Celia’s confidence to Mr Kelly, Neary’s to Wylie, had to be given for the most part obliquely. With all the more reason now, Ticklepenny’s to Murphy. It will not take many moments (*M*, 56–57).

Yet there is a sardonic obtrusiveness to this speaker’s comments which is not Joycean, or is perhaps more than Joycean. Unlike the Arranger, who does not use “the voice of the storyteller” for he is “not a voice at all, since [he] does not address us, does not even speak,” *Murphy*’s narrator rehearses *Dream*’s Gidean mirroring of the writer (a “Mr

Beckett") within his own fiction. Joyce's tale may not be "in the old sense . . . 'told'; it is mimed in words arranged on pages in space" but Beckett's story *is*, by a figure who has the power to control his narrative techniques (and as we shall see, the plot itself) in accordance with his whims.¹² In the passage that follows the quotation above, for example, *Murphy's* narrator refuses to allow Ticklepenny to speak for himself; instead, the narrator paraphrases the discussion with Murphy in order to avoid listening to any more of his character's "wretched" speech (*M*, 53).

This figure is more than a narrator, then; he is what *The Unnamable* calls the "ventriloquist" of the text.¹³ With perhaps the exception of *Murphy* (an important exception, as we shall see), he controls the novel's characters with impunity: "All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet" (*M*, 78). In short, this speaker is a figure for the *novelist*. In this sense, as Frederik Smith and C. J. Ackerley have recently suggested, there is a parallel between *Murphy's* narrative technique and Thackeray's "puppet-mastery," and the storytelling machinations of writers like Fielding.¹⁴ Yet this comparison breaks down when we take a harder look at the role of *Murphy's* "puppeteer" and the specific irony he generates in the text, an irony which represents one response to what Beckett considered the crucial problem facing the "modern" writer after Proust.

In his 1930 lectures, Beckett targets not only the "artificial unification of character" in the nineteenth-century naturalist novel, but its contrived narrative trajectory, which inevitably moves toward "closure" and the affirmation of a "hierarchy of values." In contrast, Beckett champions a "*new structure*" for the novel exemplified by Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. In this book Gide imparts a "*quality of inconclusiveness*" to his modern form, partly through inserting the figure of a self-doubting novelist whose struggle with his characters and plot undermines his authority while preventing the narrative from reaching a satisfying "conclusion" (MIC60, 42).¹⁵ *Dream's* "Mr Beckett" was his author's initial response to this paradigm; like Gide's "novelist" in the chapter "The Author Reviews His Characters," "Mr Beckett" laments his unfortunate task and criticizes his puppets for their incompatibility with the novel's form in the chapter "UND." *Murphy*, of course, rehearses a version of this Gidean gesture in Chapter Six (where, as in "UND", the narrator sketches the problematic divisions in his tripartite Dostoevskian character with a sardonic flourish):

It is most unfortunate, but the point of this story has been reached where a justification of the expression "Murphy's mind" has to be attempted. Happily we need not concern ourselves with this apparatus as it really was—that would be an extravagance and an impertinence—but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be . . . This painful duty having now been discharged, no further bulletins will be issued (*M*, 69, 72).

Yet such attempts to critique the novel by destabilizing its center of narrative authority are of course inevitably contrived counterfeits in their own right. That is, everything in the form is controlled and ordered, and even the modern novelist's struggle with his

776 characters, his form, and “chance” events move the story toward the form of narrative closure decided upon by the real author. As Beckett points out, there is thus a “coherence in Gide that . . . he can’t avoid” (MIC60, 25); “language,” Beckett concludes, “can’t express confusion” (MIC60, 16–17). In one sense, the argument for the modern novel terminates here in an impasse: the novelist can never adequately express an incoherent reality by means of a form which inevitably forces that reality to cohere.

But if Gide’s work presents no solution to this problem, it does suggest the possibility of an ironic reflection on this dilemma at the level of form: a complex double maneuver through which both randomness and its opposite are ironically staged by the novelist figure within the fiction. Using Bergson as a signpost for modernity, and Racine (in this instance) as an example of a writer whose form fatalistically proceeds toward an inevitable closure, Beckett argues that “Gide alone . . . insists on reconciliation between [the] authentic incoherence of post-Bergsonian thought & [the] coherence of Racine statement” (MIC60, 16–17). In other words, Gide joins the modern attempt (at portraying the irreducible complexity of experience) with an overtly coherent structure by which the characters are, as Ackerley puts it regarding Racine and *Murphy*, “brought to a preordained ending.”¹⁶ This ironic conjunction deploys the inevitable coherence of narrative in the interest of exposing the author as a puppet-master who can only *play* at presenting reality, *especially* the reality of incoherence. This “reconciliation,” according to Beckett, was revealed not primarily through Gide’s “thought,” but through his “quality of expression” and his “style” (MIC60, 17).

For several reasons I think that in discussing this reconciliation via a certain style Beckett was thinking primarily of the way authorship is dramatized in the *sotie* Gide completed immediately before *Les Faux-Monnayeurs: Les Caves du Vatican*.¹⁷ This novel is an obvious point of reference, since it has frequently been read as an exploration of the way that chance events in the novel ironically reveal their preordained position in an ordered structure. And Beckett apparently read it in a similar way, given his focus on Gide’s treatment of the unmotivated crime (which is the event around which Gide’s investigation of “chance” turns).¹⁸ This supposition is also supported by the fact that Beckett’s above statement occurs immediately after his account of *Les Caves du Vatican* in his discussion on Gide as the modern inheritor of Racine. Most importantly, Beckett’s novel reveals an appropriation of *Les Caves du Vatican*’s ironic narrative techniques.

As Peter Broome points out, *Les Caves du Vatican* represents an important transition in Gide’s writing away from the spirituality and nuanced sentiment of his *récits* toward the “drier, more elliptical,” and perhaps more overtly ironical and critical type of fiction which culminated in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*. Gide also shifted from a first to a third-person narrator and used restricted characterization, the devices of the puppet-theatre, and knockabout farce to explore the accidental and inconsequence, concepts which were intended to disrupt any kind of fixed sequence by the introduction of the unexpected.¹⁹ *Les Caves du Vatican* also marks Gide’s interest at this time in the adventure novel and a subset of this genre, the detective novel, because they

are ideally suited to this purpose. Motifs such as the search and the elaborate chain of circumstance, for instance, provide opportunities for creating situations in which events appear to occur unpredictably or by chance, disrupting the Balzacian model of the novel. *Les Caves du Vatican*, Broome has argued, "is a breeding ground for all that upsets sequences and predictable progressions."²⁰ Protos and Lafcadio are agents of disturbance, problematizing any straightforward plot: the latter seeks an act which will be free from plausible motivation and the former runs a secret organization which manipulates the other characters. But it is Lafcadio around whom the most poignant chance events cluster, just as it may appear that his attempt to achieve a free action defies notions of causality.

Lafcadio's attempt at a free action is of course his murder of Fleurissoire. Gide goes out of his way to point up the ways that this meeting is the result of a highly improbable intersection of arbitrary and comic circumstances. Equally, in responding to it Lafcadio's only motivation appears to be the paradoxical desire to act without motivation, and even seems to rely on events outside his control to dictate his actions. For example, considering whether or not he should murder the man whom he will later realize is actually his half-brother, Lafcadio appears to surrender the onus of the decision to an arbitrary time-space relation: "If I can count up to 12, without hurrying, before I see a light in the country-side, [Fleurissoire] is saved."²¹

But all of Lafcadio's actions, even his attempt to break out of consequence via a free act, are framed within a self-reflexive narrative. And just as *Les Caves du Vatican* raises the possibility of Lafcadio's freedom, it also calls that freedom into question. In fact, though Gide succeeds in presenting an unpredictable novel that avoids a mechanistic sequence of events, he does so to such an extreme that the wildly artificial quality of his narrative is also ironically exposed as part of an inevitable, preordained progression. This exposure of artifice actually only provokes questions of possibility, even as it ironically suggests that the novel cannot present inconsequence or freedom. By revealing the fabricated nature of the fiction's narrative structure, Gide's *time sequences* reveal ironic perspectives in the novel which are unavailable to his characters:

The structural devices chosen by Gide [such as] the juxtaposition, then sudden convergence in time, of unrelated series of events . . . emphasize and highlight some aspect of the relation of time sequences to consequence. Gide's literary ordering of time opens into his world perspectives which are not those of the characters involved in the story. These perspectives are different in nature from those the ordering of time introduces into the world of Proust or Joyce.²²

These perspectives are alien to those encountered in Beckett's other great novelistic masters because, raised above the limited view of the protagonists, the reader encounters the knowing gaze of a colluding individual: Gide's ironic puppeteer, playing a double game of chance *and* determinism in the same text.

Gide achieves this elevation partly through sheer overdetermination of the conditions governing chance in the novel (thereby indicating a relation of these conditions to an overarching design), but in *Les Caves du Vatican* the novelist's continually ob-

778 trusive presence and his omnipotent role are also highlighted in the *mise en abyme* of the Millipede. This is a hidden organization which manipulates characters in the manner of a novelistic plot, and even revises Lafcadio's spontaneous crime for its own ends.²³ In this way, the Millipede functions as an inner mirror, holding up to us the fact that the novel's plot is only a form of play with the idea of chance conducted by the ironic novelist.²⁴ It is for this reason that the precise timing of the multiple plotlines is extremely important. A gesture at the unknowable complexity of reality, they are also part of a fictional strategy which reveals the limitations of the novel in communicating inconsequence—once again by exposing the novelist as its master. As David Walker puts it, Gide's "self-conscious exploitation of narrative techniques . . . shows up as a formal contrivance what in the conventional realist novel seeks to pass itself off as natural."²⁵

Ironically, the same aspect of *Murphy*'s construction, the apparent ineluctability with which the ending is brought to pass by the "machinery of the plot," has been used by Beckett's readers to describe its structure as that of a realist or traditional novel, or as evidence of a skeptically anti-novelistic approach.²⁶ Yet once the source of this technique is understood, *Murphy* reveals itself as a text which only borrows the modes and means of realism to energetically expose itself as the construct of a cunning personality. Like the novelist figure of *Les Caves du Vatican*, *Murphy*'s speaker ironically plays with the "plausible concatenation[s]" of the detective genre to present an elaborately farcical plot in which carefully-timed chance occurrences only *appear* to converge to determine events.²⁷

One such sequence occurs in Chapter Seven, where we learn how Beckett's unwilling protagonist was found and lost by Neary's man, Cooper. The twin factors of Cooper's alcoholism and the presence of a gin palace "superior to any he had ever seen" right on the corner of the mew where Murphy lives lead to the first delay in contacting Neary (*M*, 76). Murphy's collapse "in the appalling position described in section three" seconds before Cooper finally enters the room (and which suggest to him that "a murder had been bungled" (*M*, 77)) result in his second. The third delay is caused by the destruction of the mew precisely at the time Cooper goes looking for a drink in Wapping, eventually returning him to Neary with no idea as to Murphy's whereabouts. But these chance events also fatefully bring together Neary, Counihan, and Wylie with Celia by virtue of another chain of coincidence. The fact that Cooper glimpses Celia as she slips into Murphy's at the exact moment he is leaving seems to be the initial event here; but remember that in Chapter Three we learned that Celia's presence there in the first place has also been carefully predicated on chance and unlikely timing. Seconds before glimpsing Cooper, she is racked with indecision as to whether or not to abandon Murphy; unable to choose, she flips a coin and, based on its verdict, decides to leave. At that very moment, Murphy falls and cries out and Celia decides to rush in after all, running past Cooper.

There is no *mise en abyme* in *Murphy* for the figure of the novelist, but like Gide, Beckett does not need one to remove any doubt that such coincidences are not actually random after all. One could easily argue that all of the convergences and divergences in

Murphy (Celia's delivery of the horoscope and Murphy's encounter with Ticklepenny excepted) have little or no effect on what actually happens in the end. This alone grants the reader an ironic perspective and the suspicion — as each opportunity just misses its mark or suddenly falls into convenient alignment with what “has to happen” — that the novel is actually an extended knockabout farce inevitably leading to a preordained denouement. Like Cooper's shuttered-up gin palace, *Murphy's* entire plot is “bathed . . . in an ironical radiance” “by . . . striking coincidence” (*M*, 70). For instance, recall that having waited at home day and night, Celia eventually misses Murphy by just five minutes when she goes for a walk, just as Murphy goes to his doom. Or consider Celia's glimpse of Murphy's birthmark after he falls over in the chair, a sign which allows her to identify him after he has been immolated. To borrow Walker's contention about Gide's development of this technique in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, “each coincidence . . . marks the point at which the narrative advances via an articulation which is essentially self-contradictory, being so obviously unforeseeable as an event, so flagrantly purposive as a structuring device.”²⁸

Instead of quelling our suspicions about the purposive nature of these events, the novelist does his best to *cultivate* them. The most obvious example of this is his favorite refrain: “So all things limp together for the only possible” (*M*, 146). “Despite all these coincidences,” *Murphy's* novelist figure seems to say, “there will be only one outcome.” And let us not forget the *deus ex machina* that triggers the expected end: Murphy's breakdown and recourse to the chair coincident with the mysterious influx of gas which had earlier stymied the resourceful Ticklepenny. Given the novelist's disgust with his protagonist—never more evident than in his pleasure at the *ironic fulfilment* of Murphy's desires (for his body to be quiet, for heat, for chaos)—can we doubt *who* turned on the gas and applied the spark in this parody of “Racinian lightning”?²⁹ “The gas went on in the WC, *excellent gas, superfine chaos* . . . *Soon his body was quiet*” (*M*, 158; my emphasis).

It is becoming clear that Gide's and Beckett's exposure of the novel as an artificial system also reveals a common view of the novelist within the fiction. He is not only a counterfeiter, but an almost malign being that creates, thwarts and disposes of his characters virtually at will. As we shall see, he does so as part of a joke (which he finds tiresome) at the expense of systems *per se*. This attempt to parody and undermine systems is central to Gide's *soties*, and especially to *Les Caves du Vatican*.³⁰ Wolfgang Holdheim has argued that the novel is primarily a critique of systems while Alain Goulet has suggested that its focus is subverting fixed notions of being; but whatever Gide's specific targets in *Les Caves du Vatican*, his readers agree that “the characters have some unquestioning way of knowing that [he] seeks to disrupt.”³¹ To borrow from Jonathan Culler, *Les Caves du Vatican* anticipates the kinds of modern fiction which do not present the novel as mimesis but “the novel as a structure which plays with different modes of ordering” and creating meaning.³² The novel's self-reflexivity thus parodies the need to make sense of an illogical and problematic situation by means of inevitably self-serving beliefs — a situation that generates a particular, and distinctly

780 Gidean, kind of irony which Beckett clearly admired and imitated. To use Germaine Brée's analogy, this disjunction between reality and belief is the comedy of an absurd game in which the players do not know the rules but think they do, a game which "emphasizes the ironical incongruity of an inner coherence when it is transferred outwards and attributed to a world moving at random."³³

Les Caves du Vatican is full of characters that stubbornly commit to various "closed systems." Some represent specific targets, but Gide's attack is more broadly aimed at the human need to use systems in order to simplify complexity. Anthime, for example, a scientific atheist who is converted to Catholicism and then re-converted to atheism at the end of the novel, is perhaps the most obvious example of the need for truth:

Organic matter was obviously governed by the same involuntary impulses as those which turn the flower of heliotrope to face the sun (a fact which is easily to be explained by a few simple laws of physics and thermochemistry). The order of the universe could at last be hailed as reassuringly benign. In all the motions of life, however surprising, a perfect obedience to the agent could be universally recognised (*LA*, 14).

Once he has converted to Christianity, Anthime behaves just like the rats that he has been experimenting on, repeating automatically, "Whatever is done in the Lord's name is well done" even as he is fleeced and abandoned by the church (*LA*, 136).

There are two other obvious representatives of "closed systems" in the novel. The first is Julius, a novelistic naturalist who fails to comprehend the anti-hero Lafcadio. He tries to study Lafcadio through a naturalistic "background" investigation of Lafcadio's room but fails to understand what he finds. The second is Blafaphas, the representative of bourgeois commercial enterprise who wants to know how the Italians make the hole in the macaroni. Fleurissoire is of course the grand example of the way that even "fact, instead of correcting, can give credence to fiction."³⁴ Fitting each event into his fantasy of a heroic destiny—which positions him as the unlikely savior of the Pope—Fleurissoire inevitably sees support for his theory everywhere, from the suspicious formalities of the Castel Sant' Angelo to the press cutting Protos shows him which exposes Fleurissoire's delusion as one of the Millipede's scams.

Murphy, too, presents a world whose ironical incongruity consists in the characters' projections of coherence onto an incoherent situation. The most obvious examples are Murphy's attempt to gain a self-sufficient freedom in his elaborate conception of his mind (which is increasingly coupled with his astrological destiny); Neary's Pythagorean mysticism (*The Doctrine of the Limit*); and Wylie's vision of the "quantum of wantum."³⁵ All are cosmic closed systems which allow their proponents to ignore any evidence to the contrary by explaining everything in their own, comforting terms:

"The advantage of this view," said Wylie, is, that while one may not look forward to things getting any better, a least one need not fear their getting any worse. They will always be the same as they always were."

"Until the system is dismantled," said Neary.

"Supposing that to be permitted," said Wylie. (*M*, 39)

Murphy is perhaps the worst offender, persisting in his "lovingly simplified and perverted" delusions with all the fervor of a Fleurissoire until he too is disposed of for his impertinence (*M*, 112). By the time he has begun work at the Magdalen Mental Mercyseat, "Nothing remained but to see what [Murphy] wanted to see" (*M*, 111). "Any fool can turn the blind eye," the novelist acknowledges, but Murphy's resistance to reality outstrips even that of a Wylie: "but who knows what the ostrich sees in the sand?" (*M*, 111).³⁶

Of course, these worlds are *not* governed by Murphy's stars, Wylie's system, or Fleurissoire's destiny, nor do they revolve at random. And the disjunction between the reality which the characters cannot grasp and their systems reveals a Gidean irony at work in Beckett's novel. This irony appears most poignant when the novelist, enjoying being pedantic, habitually uses Murphy's own astrological system to describe events which Murphy believes are leading him to freedom, but which are actually tending toward his doom:

Celia's triumph over Murphy, following her confidence to her grandfather, was gained about the middle of September, Thursday the 12th to be pedantic, a little before the Ember Days, the sun being still in the Virgin. Wylie rescued Neary, consoled and advised him, a week later, as the sun with a sigh of relief passed over into the Balance. The encounter, *on which so much unhinges*, between Murphy and Ticklepenny, took place on Friday, October the 11th (*though Murphy did not know that*), the moon being full again, but not nearly so near the earth as when last in opposition.

Let us now take Time that old fornicator . . . back to Monday, October the 7th. (*M*, 73; my emphasis)

The novelist is clearly controlling the arrangement of events as easily as he manipulates the diegesis. He is arranging his figures like pieces on a chessboard, an analogy that both novels use as an inner mirror for their characters' behavior. Though Lafcadio claims that in life one should have "no more right to take back one's move than at chess," the reader can see what Lafcadio realizes only later: that Lafcadio's move is actually part of a larger game whose rules he does not understand (*LA*, 216). In the same way, each of Gide's and Beckett's characters is caught in the maze constructed by the final system-builder, the novelist. As in Murphy's final match with Endon, the apparent choices the characters make, and the apparently random moves they observe, lead to an inevitable "fool's mate" at the hands of the scornful chessmaster who waits to brush them from his board (*M*, 153). As Beckett's narrator says of the unctuous Ticklepenny, there will be no chance for these pieces to take back a move; if they do return, it will be in a rather less serious match of his devising. There is only one destiny operating in this cosmos:

This creature does not merit any particular description. The merest pawn in the game between Murphy and his stars, he makes his little move, engages an issue and is swept from the board. Further use may conceivably be found for Austin Ticklepenny in a child's halma or a book-reviewer's snakes and ladders, but his chess days are over. There is no return game between a man and his stars. (*M*, 55)

- 782 Like the two chimps “playing chess” in the photograph which Beckett desired for the cover of *Murphy*, the characters in these novels cannot understand the complexities they are faced with; like monkeys in an experiment, they are pawns rather than players.

Beckett's novelist also borrows another test procedure from Gide's laboratory: while subverting his characters' systems and desires he subjects them to startling “mutations.”³⁷ This parodic technique was the result of Gide's reading in evolutionary theory; unlike Beckett, he seems to have greeted evolution because it could serve as a justification of his view of chance, contingency, and inconsequence:

[Evolution] denies the existence of a teleological design within nature and suggests that nature develops through the disordered exploration of multiple possibilities. Natural selection operates upon the products of contingency.³⁸

But Gide's reaction to evolutionary theory was not one of wholehearted acceptance. He remained troubled by Darwinian notions of linear development, which were too closely connected with an idea of unbroken causality for Gide's liking. In his reading of Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice*, however, Gide learned of the Dutch botanist Hugo de Vries, who argued that Darwin's notion of gradual transformation was incorrect and that previously unknown species can come into being through the sudden appearance of new characteristics. By the early thirties, Gide had excitedly allied himself with the views of such so-called “saltationists,” whose theories provided his concern with unforeseen occurrences and discontinuities with a new theoretical justification.³⁹ Typically, Gide then parodically deployed this concept in his developing fiction about inconsequence. De Vries's sudden leaps appear in *Les Caves du Vatican* as the startling mutations of Anthime and the novelist Julius—both, as we have seen, arch-systematisers. Such parodic inconsequence, as Beckett pointed out to his students in 1930, is of course a deliberate subversion of the naturalistic idea of character depiction in the novel. It is a comic upset on two levels, resulting in a disruption of the reader's expectations, and the characters' ideas of themselves.

Anthime's physical inability to kneel parodically reflects his unyielding stance as a defiant atheist, but after his comic standoff with the Madonna, a bizarre spiritual and physical transformation takes place in his sleep. In what Broome aptly terms a “comic swap,” the Madonna's loss of a hand results in Anthime's gain of a leg. The novelist predictably expresses his disingenuous incredulity at the results:

He was not sitting; he was not standing; the top of his head was on a level with the table and in the full light of the candle, which he had placed upon it; Anthime, the learned man of science, Anthime the atheist, who for many a long year had bowed neither his stiff knee nor his stubborn will (for it was remarkable how in his case body and soul kept pace with one another)—Anthime was kneeling! (*LA*, 41)

Like his brother-in-law Anthime, Julius undergoes a startling mutation. Initially the respectable, religious, and restrained proponent of the argument against inconsequence—

"There is no such thing as inconsequence—in psychology any more than in physics" (LA, 84)—Julius becomes the excitable and reckless character scarcely recognizable to Fleurissoire, showing signs of materialism, critiquing the Church, and obsessed with the notion of writing a novel about "a creature of inconsequence" (LA, 171).

Whether or not he understood the Darwinian influence, Beckett certainly grasped the significance of Gide's parodic approach to the unforeseen in the novel, and he appropriated this technique for some of his own characters, the most obvious being Cooper.⁴⁰ Cooper's physical rigidity is matched by his laconic personality and his mechanical reliability in performing certain tasks (to drink when the possibility arises, to obey authority, etc.) Wylie considers him virtually subhuman: "Do not be alarmed, my dear" he assures Counihan when Cooper inopportunely walks in on their amours, "This is Cooper, Neary's man. He never knocks, nor sits, nor takes his hat off" (M, 75).

As in *Les Caves du Vatican*, it turns out this character's transformation can only take place through the kind of comic swap undergone by Anthime. Murphy's death in his rocker miraculously coincides with Cooper's new lease on life (and, in another fitting swap, Cooper gains the ability to sit). And though Cooper "did not know what had happened" (M, 170), it is clear who has brought this miraculous event about. Beckett's narrator not only imitates Gide's idea of a character whose rigid body and soul "kept pace with one another," but also adopts the false surprise of the Gidean novelist at such a miracle: "Cooper sat—*sat!*—beside the driver . . ." (M, 159).

Cooper's is not the only striking mutation which occurs as a result of Murphy's demise. At the same time Murphy is being burned, Neary, too undergoes a death and rebirth. Like Cooper's, Neary's physical transformation signifies a deep-seated change in feeling:

A curious feeling had come over Neary, namely that he would not get through the night. He had felt this before, but never quite so strongly. In particular he felt that to move a muscle or utter a syllable would certainly prove fatal. He breathed with heavy caution through the long hours of darkness, trembled uncontrollably and clutched the chair-arms. *He did not feel cold, far from it*, nor unwell, nor in pain; he simply had this alarming conviction that every second was going to announce itself the first of his last ten minutes or a quarter of an hour on earth . . .

When Wylie called the following afternoon, four or five hours late, Neary's hair was white as snow, but *he felt better in himself*. (M, 138–139; my emphasis)

Though Neary can only guess at what has happened, the novelist makes sure that we can see the strings he is pulling. Neary's "sense that he would not get through the night," like the comments that he "did not feel cold, far from it," and he "felt better in himself," evoke Murphy's experience as he approaches his own transformation into a charred corpse in the rocker. But if Murphy's first mutation into a body without a mind (his second being into a bag of ash) is the unpredictable event on which others like it hinge, what might be the significance of Neary's experience of the unforeseen? A clue appears in his conversation earlier that fateful night when he speaks of "the repudiation of the known" (M, 138). In the events leading up to Murphy's doom, Neary loses not only the fervor of his former desires, but the certainties of his former convic-

784 tions—theories which we have seen allowed him conceive of the novel's world as a balanced "closed system" corresponding to arcane laws of mathematics (*M*, 38).⁴¹ By the time he emerges from the Magdalan Mental Mercyseat, Neary has been thwarted and transformed by the novelist's own system, which is rather closer to Murphy's vision of a "matrix of surds" than a universe of Pythagorean harmonies (*M*, 72). "Life," he admonishes Killiecrankie when the latter protests at his "irregular" arrangements for Murphy's disposal, "is all rather irregular" (*M*, 169).⁴²

The novelist may control the final system, but Beckett was interested in following Gide in contesting this inevitable determinism through a struggle between the free will of one exceptional character and the system of the novel. In *Les Caves du Vatican* this un-novelistic character is of course Lafcadio, a figure obsessed with the Gidean desire to subvert conventions. Gide allows him to struggle through his resistance to being wholly appropriated by the three rival novelists in the work who seek to absorb him into their constructs. The first of these is the naturalistic novelist Julius; the second, Protos, is a type of the anti-novelist; the third is the novelist of *Les Caves du Vatican*. This last novelist-figure demonstrates his dominance by placing Protos in a *roman policier* which leads to his capture by the authorities, just as Protos (unsuccessfully) tries to reprimand Lafcadio by forcing him to play a role for the secret organization of the "slim" (*LA*, 252).

Beckett was less concerned with the complexity that Gide painstakingly introduced into his novel on this score, but he too designed a protagonist who falls outside of the dominant systems. Murphy resists Celia's disastrous attempt to assimilate him into her mercantile gehenna, and—though much more pacifically than Lafcadio—Beckett's antihero resists the social order. Neary's mathematical and philosophical system, and his technique for inner "apmonia" also fail to accommodate Murphy (he remains a surd), and Murphy seems to find Wylie's quantum unconvincing. Like Dostoevsky's figures, Murphy's taste for madness and idleness reveals his desire for "an invitation, as it were, to rebel against the psychology and the ethics of the common herd" in a decidedly un-Gidean and un-Dostoevskian manner (*D*, 109).⁴³ Most importantly, though, Murphy remains an unpredictable element in the system of the novelist: "All the puppets in this book whinge sooner or later, except Murphy, who is not a puppet" (*M*, 78).

In spite of the animosity between Murphy and the novelist, this rather grudging acknowledgement of Murphy's uniqueness adds another dimension to their relationship and raises him, if not to the level of a would-be novel-destroyer like Lafcadio, to something of a rival author. Believing "*he was the prior system*," (*M*, 114) Murphy assumes the events of the novel are of his own devising when, in his chance meeting with Ticklepenney, the fulfilment of Suk's predictions seem to vindicate his belief in his destiny: "Thus the sixpence worth of sky, from the ludicrous broadsheet that Murphy had called his life-warrant . . . changed into the poem *that he alone of all the living could write*" (*M*, 60; my emphasis). At this moment, when circumstances "appeared as finally correlated in all its parts as the system from which purported to come," Murphy pulls out the horoscope to destroy it in a moment of Lafcadian pride. In a move more

typical of Beckett's comic fundamental unheroic than Gide's temper of passionate indecision, however, Murphy holds back, "mindful of his memory, and that he was not alone" (*M*, 60).

As we have seen of other events in the novel, this chance meeting reveals an ironic perspective unavailable to Murphy: the encounter as a pre-planned move by the novelist as he arranges his piece's "fool's mate" on his Racinian chessboard (*M*, 138). Here the artifice behind this encounter (as well as its fatal repercussions) is highlighted by the pattern weaving Ticklepenney's offhanded reference to Romeo ("Wotanope!" [*M*, 55]) with the famous (and ill-fated) *defiance* of the stars that appears as the epigram to Murphy's (ironically-titled) "life-warrant" (*M*, 22). Such relations and patterns are in themselves obvious aspects of the novel's construction to the seasoned Beckett reader, and extend well beyond those sketched in this essay. But once Beckett's Gidean perspective on the novel and its limits is re-established as a governing theoretical frame for these relations we can begin to see *Murphy* as a work of novelistic criticism at one with Beckett's ongoing effort to parody and erode the illusion of "plausible concatenation" in the novel and expose "the grotesque fallacy of a realistic art" (*PTD*, 82, 76).

Notes

1. Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 143. See also Hugh Kenner, *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Study* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 75.

2. John Fletcher, *The Novels of Samuel Beckett* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 41. For J.M. Coetzee's reading of *Murphy* as a metafiction see his "The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's *Murphy*" in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 31–38 (hereafter cited in text as *DP*).

3. Kenner, *Samuel Beckett*, 75–6; Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou*, 142.

4. John Bolin, "'Preserving the Integrity of Incoherence'?: Dostoevsky, Gide, and the Novel in Beckett's 1930 lectures and *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*," *Review of English Studies* 60 (September 2009): 515–537.

5. This book seems to have come tantalizingly close to realization, but in the end (as with Beckett's Dostoevsky book), it was never written. Its history is as follows. In early February of 1932, Beckett suggested to Prentice that he write a book on Gide, but the idea was turned down. See James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), n. 78, 733 (hereafter cited in text as *DTF*). By August, Beckett was again considering the project, this time for *New Statesman*. (John Pilling, *A Samuel Beckett Chronology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 38). During this summer the book seems to have developed a certain shape and focus, and Beckett told McGreevy that he was considering a subtitle ("*paralysed in ubiquity*") (*DTF*, 165). He was frustrated by his inability to write up at this point, however; he "made a desperate effort to get something started on Gide but failed again," despite having progressed to the stage that he had collated all the quotations he wished to use by September of 1932 (SB quoted in *DTF*, n. 116, 735; Pilling, *Samuel Beckett Chronology*, 39). In early August of 1934, Beckett again wrote to McGreevy, telling him he had proposed an essay on either Gide or Rimbaud to the *Bookman* (*DTF*, 189). This last proposal was also turned down in favour of a piece on "the 'wicked' Censorship in Ireland"—a commission Beckett accepted "without enthusiasm" (*DTF*, 189). Beckett was clearly still thinking about Gide at the time he was writing *Murphy*: he quoted a modified version of Gide's dictum that "Il est bon de suivre sa pente, pourvu que ce soit en montant" as "poursuivre ta pente pourvu qu'elle soit en montant" in a letter to McGreevy on September 8, 1934. (*The Letters of Samuel Beckett*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 223.) For Gide's saying see his *The Counterfeiters*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Penguin Books, 1966), 327.

6. Notes from Samuel Beckett's lectures, taken by Rachel Dobbin [Burrows], Trinity College Library, Dublin, MIC60, 29 (hereafter cited in text by manuscript number).

7. Describing Dostoevsky's treatment of character, Beckett quoted from Gide: "I know no writer richer in contradictions and inconsistencies than Dostoevsky; Nietzsche would describe them as *antagonisms*" (MIC60, 21); André Gide, *Dostoevsky*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949), 51, 126 (hereafter cited in text as *D*).

8. Belacqua is "trine" "at his simplest"—"Centripetal, centrifugal and . . . not." Samuel Beckett, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (London, 1993), 120 (hereafter cited in text as *DFM*). Like Murphy, Beckett's first hero retreats into his third self, "the dark gulf, where the glare of the will and the hammer-strokes of the brain . . . were expunged" (*DFM*, 121).

9. Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, ed. J. C. C. Mays (London: Faber, 2009), 71 (hereafter cited in text as *M*).

10. Hugh Kenner, *Ulysses* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 63–4.

11. *Ibid.*, 71.

12. *Ibid.*, 65

13. Speaking of Beckett's early fictions, the Unnamable points out that "it was clumsily done, you could see the ventriloquist" Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, ed. Steven Connor (London: Faber, 2010), 63.

14. C. J. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars: The Annotated Murphy* (Tallahassee: Journal of Beckett Studies Books, 1998), 19; Frederik Smith, *Beckett's Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002), 75–6.

15. Throughout this essay, the term "novelist" will usually denote the fictional writer-figure within the novel, rather than either the real Beckett or Gide.

16. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars*, 38. Beckett's readers have argued for Racine's treatment of plot as an important influence on *Murphy* for some time; Ackerley, perhaps *Murphy*'s most dedicated reader, tentatively places Beckett's second novel in Racine's tradition before all others. Beckett's ironic use of Racine in *Murphy* is a subject for another essay, but it should be recognized that it is very possible that the reason Racine shows up in *Murphy* at all is because Beckett considered that Gide had already appropriated him in the interests of modernizing the novel—and it was *this* model which Beckett sought to emulate.

17. See Peter Broome, *Gide: Les Caves du Vatican* (Valencia: Grant & Cutler, 1995), 11–12.

18. Beckett's lectures indicate he knew *Les Caves du Vatican* well and devoted a significant amount of instruction time to it and its related topics, such as Gide's adaptation of Dostoevsky's "mental conflict" (the "coexistence of apparently mutually exclusive states in the same organ"), and Lafcadio's "act that cannot be reduced to motive" (MIC60, 14). Beckett's attention to this latter theme also indicates his awareness that Gide's confrontation with what Germaine Brée has described as "the interaction between chance, will and necessity" in his fiction was not confined to his experiments in *Les Faux-Monnayeurs*, but found other expressions (Germaine Brée, "On Time Sequences and Consequences in the Gidian World," in *André Gide*, ed. David Walker (New York: Longman, 1996), 43). Note also Beckett's mention of "Gide's *Lafcadio*" in his 1934 review of Leishmann's translation of Rilke's *Poems*. See Samuel Beckett, *Disjecta* (London: John Calder, 2001), 66. See also his playful mention of Gide and "*crime immotivé*" to Nuala Costello in a letter of 27 February, 1934 (Beckett, *Letters*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, 186). Beckett was still thinking about Gide's novel in the year after he finished *Murphy*; he puns on the name of writer and teacher Patrick Lafcadio Hearn in a letter to Mary Manning Howe of 18 January, 1937 (Beckett, *Letters*, vol. 1, 1929–1940, 423).

19. Broome, *Gide*, 11–12.

20. *Ibid.*, 49.

21. André Gide, *Lafcadio's Adventures*, trans. Dorothy Bussy. (New York: Vintage, 2003), 216 (hereafter cited in text as *LA*).

22. Brée, "Time Sequences," 43–51; 47.

23. The comparison between revising a work of literature and correcting an action in life is initiated in Lafcadio's discussion with Julius in book II, but is picked up again in Lafcadio's conversation

with Protos (who has "revised" Lafcadio's crime) in book IV. Lafcadio argues that life is superior to art because it does not allow touch-ups. "In life one corrects *oneself*," he tells Julius, "but one can't correct what one *does*. It is the power of revising that makes writing such a colourless affair . . . Yes! That's what seems to me so fine about life. It's like fresco-painting—erasures aren't allowed" (LA, 86).

24. *Caves* also suggests the novelist's limitations but as Babcock has pointed out, these gestures are perhaps also a part of the novelist's game—they may even reveal a higher level of control and subtlety on the part of the novelist. For example, though the novelist seems to regret the fact that Lafcadio can apparently fall in love against his wishes, when this actually happens at the end of the novel he interrupts the scene and starts writing a new volume. "The Novelist's rather broad gestures at the autonomy of his characters serve only to demonstrate that it is he who pulls the strings, that there can be no such thing as novelistic autonomy." Arthur E. Babcock, *Portraits of Artists: Reflexivity in Gidean Fiction, 1902–1946* (York, SC: French Literature Publications Company, 1982), 79.

25. David Walker, *André Gide* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 133.

26. Ackerley, *Demented Particulars*, 38. See Kenner's argument that *Murphy* is an attempt to emulate "the workman-like linkages of Flaubertian fiction" in its use of coincidence to resolve the narrative (Kenner, *Samuel Beckett*, 75). Citing Celia's identification of Murphy by his birthmark, Kenner suggests that "In Flaubertian fiction, of which *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are supreme examples, a myriad of unimportant matters are not scattered like sand over the text but nestle into it perfectly" (ibid.) In contrast, John Fletcher argues that "the finicky precision with which the simultaneities of the action are pointed out, as well as the virtuosity with which the different events of the intrigue are harmonized and the characters made to converge, would seem to constitute a deliberate *défi de maître*." (Fletcher, *Novels of Samuel Beckett*, 41). The source of this technique has hitherto remained unclear. *Murphy*'s apparently inevitable progression toward its dénouement has often been attributed to Racine's influence (Ludovic Janvier, for example, describes the novel as "*Andromaque jouée par les Marx Brothers*" [qtd. in Ackerley, *Demented Particulars*, 38]), but this answer fails to satisfy. The complex arrangement of Beckett's plot serves to reveal the machinations of an *individual*—*Murphy*'s sardonic novelist—who is quite unlike the chthonic powers that govern Racine's universe.

27. Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1999), 82 (hereafter cited in text as *PTD*).

28. Walker, *André Gide*, 159.

29. Even as he details Murphy's regretful birth, the novelist promises us this satisfyingly cruel end as an eventual payoff: "His rattle will make amends" (*M*, 47). The phrase "Racinian lightning" appears in Beckett's *Whoroscope* notebook (entry #3) in his early sketches for the fiction that would become *Murphy* (Reading University Library MS 3000).

30. Gide labeled *Les Caves du Vatican* a *sotie* in order to differentiate it from his idea of the novel. The *sotie* is a term "borrowed from a burlesque a satirical form of medieval drama which [Gide] also applied retrospectively to *Paludes* and *Le Prométhée Mal Enchaîné*" (Walker, *Gide*, 137).

31. See Wolfgang W. Holdheim, *Theory and Practice of the Novel: A Study on André Gide* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968), 213–4 and Alain Goulet, *Les Caves du Vatican d'André Gide: Etude méthodologique* (Paris: Larousse, 1972), 27. See also Babcock, *Portraits of Artists*, 76.

32. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), 238. Broome also points out that this was an important aspect of the novel's historical position. Published on the brink of the First World War, its critique of a host of belief systems and certainty in general figures a deepening "crisis of values" in Europe (Broome, *Gide*, 11–12).

33. Brée, "Time Sequences," 47.

34. Broome, *Gide*, 35.

35. Wylie considers his theory a sceptical one. "'I greatly fear,' said Wylie, 'that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary'" (*M*, 38). But as Murphy reflects following the loss of his biscuits, Wylie's theory, like Neary's, is consolatory: "Wylie in Murphy's place might have consoled himself with the thought that the Park was a closed system in which there could be no loss of appetite; Neary with the unction of an *Ipse dixit*" (*M*, 65).

788 36. The answer, for Murphy as with Fleurissoire, is of course “his irrevocable Destiny.” This last point also highlights the fact that both works include types of the novel in their critique of systems, for both Murphy and Fleurissoire are quixotic figures whose follies parody the quest novel. Consider also Counihan’s version: *Murphy* is a romance with the eponymous hero as her “knighterrant” (*M*, 35).

37. I take this term and my account of Gide in the following remarks from Walker, who argues that evolutionary theory was crucial to Gide’s narrative approach (Walker, *Gide*, 106–119).

38. Beckett read *Origin of Species* in 1932 and felt that he had “never read such badly written cat lap” (quoted in *DF*, 161); Walker, *Gide*, 84.

39. Walker, *Gide*, 110–11.

40. It is possible that Beckett was not only aware of these “evolutionary” ideas via the burlesque of *Les Caves du Vatican*, for in his lectures he described Gide’s debts to Bergson in some detail. For Gide, Beckett argued, “thought goes further than science”; he then pointed out that Gide derived his concepts of inconsistency in *Les Caves du Vatican* (specifically the *crime immotivé*) from Bergson’s idea of *imprévisibilité* (MIC60, 14). Consider also Beckett’s interest in discovering this last concept in other novelistic forerunners of the modern novel Gide argued for in *Dostoïevsky*; for example, Beckett (literally) highlighted *l’imprevu* three times in his annotations of Stendhal’s *Le Rouge et le Noir* in his *Dream* notebook. Samuel Beckett, *Beckett’s Dream Notebook*, ed. John Pilling (Reading: Beckett International Foundation, 1999), 128–9.

41. “Do not despair,” Neary tells Counihan and Wylie in the course of their frustrated search, “Remember there is no triangle, however obtuse, but the circumference of some circle passes through its wretched vertices” (*M*, 132).

42. It is worth noting that Neary’s position at the end is an obvious example of the way both *Les Caves du Vatican* and *Murphy* present a “skewed parody of narrative resolution” in the way they ironically deflate their characters’ expectations and desires (Walker, *Gide*, 130). Through a set of random convergences, Neary is finally granted Counihan (by this point she is only a pest for him) through the death of Murphy (who had replaced Counihan as the object of his fixation) just as Neary is informed that his wife, the other main obstacle to his former passion for Counihan, is also dead (“for some time,” Cooper points out) (*M*, 170).

43. *Murphy*’s protagonist in this sense represents a parodic re-writing of *Dostoïevsky*’s antiheroic, anti-realist type in more general ways. In centring on themes of idleness and madness, Beckett assents to Gide’s argument (referring to the protagonist of *Notes from Underground*—according to Gide the summit of Dostoevsky’s achievement) that “action presupposes a certain intellectual inferiority” (*D*, 109).